

## **Massachusetts Responses: SDFSCA State Grants Program**

The SDFSCA State Grants Program is established under Title IV, Subpart I of NCLB. The program provides funds to State and local educational agencies and Governors to support the implementation of programs and activities designed to prevent youth drug use and violence. Funds are awarded to State educational agencies and Governors based on a formula included in the statute. State educational agencies sub-grant funds to local school districts based on a statutory formula; Governors award funds to community-based organizations and other entities on a competitive basis.

### **Currently as implemented, what are the strengths of the SDFSCA State Grants Program?**

- In Massachusetts, specific liaisons are assigned to LEA's, which assures continuity and gives LEA coordinators, a person to contact for technical assistance.
  - ♦ SDFS liaisons trained as trainers of research-based programs.
  - ♦ Saves district money while also making it easier for staff be trained and to implement programs with fidelity.
- MA has strong collaborative efforts in place at the State and Local level to address the individual needs of schools, students and the community in which they reside.
  - ♦ School districts are now encouraged to work cooperatively with the community at large including youth serving agencies, parents, and most importantly youth.
  - ♦ The program has created an extraordinary process where whole communities have come together to create safe learning environments as well as to address the many issues/needs facing youth.
- The comprehensive data analysis of need provides districts with a realistic picture of violence and substance activities amongst district students and takes the guesswork out of determining programming needs.
- Each year grantees have a larger selection of eligible programs and activities that qualify for SDFSCA funds.
  - ♦ Using the researched-based programs and in the planning of the programs with all the appropriate members of the community,
  - ♦ private schools seems to be a weak link due to lack of understanding the goals of Title IVA

### **What are the elements of the State Grants Program that are working and addressing the needs of students and schools today?**

- Community collaboration and community networking;
  - ♦ The grant forces districts to coordinate (and utilize) all these resources to fully address student needs.
  - ♦ LEAs are able to tap into local resources to provide violence prevention programs and evaluation services to the school district.
- LEAs use of research-based programs that are based on local data.
  - ♦ LEAs are experiencing positive behavior change in both substance and violence related behavior as evidenced by their program evaluation.
- Supporting districts in implementing parent components of programs.

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**Is the SDFSCA State Grants Program working effectively to promote safe and drug-free schools across the country, specifically in rural, urban and suburban settings? What are the difficulties in determining the effectiveness of the program?**

- Through the program review process, SEA staff is able to identify the strengths and weaknesses of each local prevention program.
- Difficulties for districts in more remote areas is the lack of community resources to support programming activities.
  - ♦ Another issue is that parent involvement in some districts can be limited (either because of distance or lack of response) and this lack of involvement impacts upon the carry over of programming activities from the school to the home.
  - ♦ Researched based programs come with evaluation components but are not always used and or are difficult to implement due to time and cost.
- The Governor Program awards generally last 2 years and a new competitive process begins, thus making it for a community program to determine effectiveness.
  - ♦ Nationally recognized community programs should offer a set of evaluation tools unique to their research-based program or activity for utilization at the local level.
    - make it easier for nonprofits to meet the principles of effectiveness.
    - long term data is extremely difficult to collect unless you are funding an organization for multiple years.
    - reduce the high costs of contracting out evaluation specialists within the nonprofit world to study an organizations activities

**Are there mechanisms that could be proposed that would help determine if programs being supported with SDFSCA State Grants Program funds are effective in meeting program purposes?**

- End-of-the-year narrative report (process evaluation instrument) that would solicit specific information including the success of implementing proposed goals and objectives, program participation, parental/community involvement etc.

**Are there emerging issues facing students and schools today that the SDFSCA State Grant Program does not address and should they be addressed in the SDFSCA State Grants Program?**

- A common issue conveyed by LEA staff is desire for a greater selection of research-based programs for high school students in the areas of violence, teen dating violence and substance prevention.
- Mental health issues among adolescence are increasing at a rapid pace
  - ♦ Adolescent mental health issues and violence related behavior (bullying, suicide) and substance use and abuse. One can easily make the connection between
- Use of the Internet (i.e. cyber-bullying, etc) and other technology by students to threaten or intimidate peers and others.

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**The SDFSCA State Grants Program includes a focus on safety. Sec. 4114 (d)(7) states that recipients of the SDFSCA State Grants must have “a plan for keeping schools safe and drug-free” including, a “crisis management plan”. Considering the Nation’s focus on emergency response and crisis planning is this language sufficient to address the concern for crisis management in our schools or are further guidance or other steps necessary to address this concern?**

- The language is not sufficient because it only requires districts that receive funding to have such plans.
- ♦ What can be funded under safety and crisis management?

**Is the structure of the SDCFCA State Grants Program (awarding funds to the State Education Agency and the Governor), the most effective mechanism for the use of these funds?**

- provides an opportunity to ensure accountability and oversight to guarantee compliance with the Principles of Effectiveness..
- provides the local school district with a wealth of resources through the technical assistance of a Safe and Drug Free School liaison.

**Is the balance between flexibility and accountability contained in the statute working?**

- Many districts have learned how to make a compelling argument, and include supporting data, to design a SDFS program that truly meets the needs of their local district.
- However, in some cases it is difficult to ascertain whether or not programs are being negatively impacted by the flex option until a site visit is made to the LEA.

**Could State and local flexibility be balanced with additional core requirements that would encourage LEAs to address specific issues?**

- The primary discussion should be about student achievement and school improvement.

**How can the tension between the *Principles of Effectiveness* provisions that require that funds be spent on research-based activities and the broad list of authorized activities (many of which lack a strong research base) be resolved?**

- There could be several options:
  - ♦ Reduce the broad list of authorized activities to activities with proven effectiveness.
  - ♦ Eliminate the research-based requirement and strengthen program evaluation by requiring explicit outcome and impact benchmarks.